Meat has protein and nutrients to keep you strong, grow your brain,
WHITE OAK PASTURES

QUALITY, NUTRIENT-PACKED ANIMAL FOODS, INCLUDING LOCAL, REGENERATIVELY PRODUCED RED MEAT TO SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS."

THE STATE OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Children's health is facing a concerning decline worldwide, as evidenced by alarming statistics across various health indicators. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), childhood obesity rates have nearly tripled since 1975, with over 340 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 now classified as overweight or obese. In the United States alone, childhood obesity affects approximately 18.5% of children and adolescents aged 2-19. Mental health issues are also on the rise, with an estimated 10-20% of children and adolescents worldwide experiencing mental disorders. These statistics underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the multifaceted factors driving the decline in children's health and well-being.

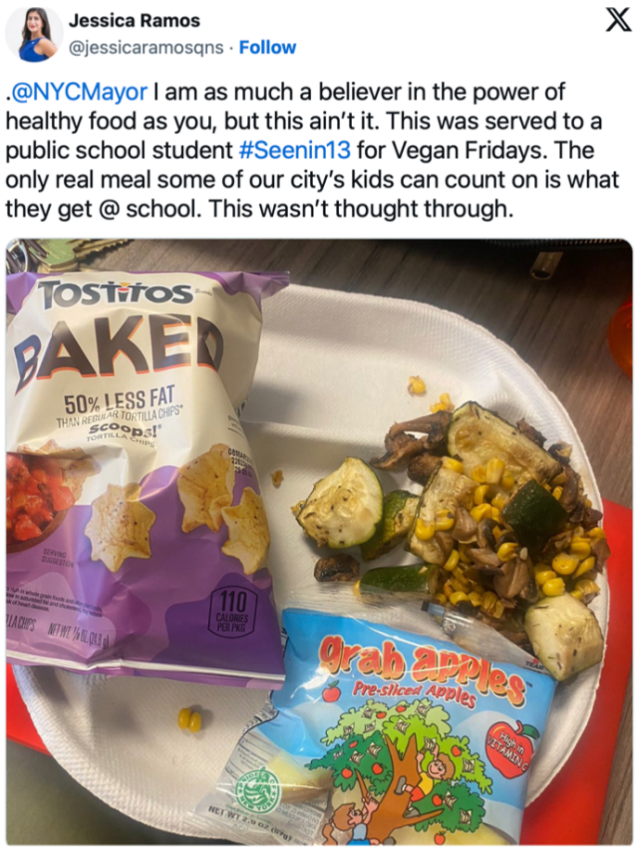
While various factors contribute to this trend, poor dietary habits are a significant player. **Equitable access to quality food and nutrition education can change the trajectory of future generation's health.**

ANTI-MEAT NARRATIVE

While children's health is declining, they are also being told to stop eating one of the most nutritious foods available - meat. Initiatives like Meatless Mondays and Vegan Fridays in the NYC public schools, proposals for warning labels on meat, and the concentrated and extremely misguided attack that is occuring on all animal sourced foods seek to continue limiting access to animal foods.

What is the result of those initiatives? Kids hear that meat is unhealthy and are less likely to choose it outside of school. And what are they replacing the meat with? It's not expensive organic kale and chickpea bowls… they're just going to eat more of the ultra-processed junk foods and less nutrient dense foods like meat.

When NYC mayor Eric Adams implemented the Vegan Fridays in the public school systems, this is what was served at lunch time:



As kids eat more ultra processed foods, they are ingesting more “empty” calories of sugars and starches. This means less protein and vital micronutrients needed for proper physical and brain development. Animal sourced foods like meat contain iron, B12, zinc and protein for kids, which we know will lead to better health for their growing bodies.

REMOVING MEAT IS UNSCIENTIFIC AND DANGEROUS

There is no evidence that removing meat from kids’ diets results in better health outcomes. In fact, vegan and vegetarian diets result in nutrient deficiencies that may have dire consequences for the growth and development of children. Only one randomized controlled trial (RCT) - the gold standard in scientific evidence - has been conducted to examine the effect of including meat versus limiting meat in kids’ diets. The study found that kids that received additional meat as a snack at school saw improved growth, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes compared to kids who received no additional food and even compared to those who were given more calories or kids who received only extra milk as a snack.

In contrast, studies used to justify limiting or eliminating meat are based on heavily biased and flawed observational research, which cannot prove cause.

Animal-source foods like meat, dairy, and eggs are uniquely healthy, especially when it comes to the growth and development of children. Animal-source foods are the best source of heme iron and the only source of B12, both critical for healthy growth, energy, and brain function. B12 deficiency can lead to severe and irreversible delays in cognitive development, impaired academic performance, nerve damage, and failure to thrive. DHA, a fatty acid needed for brain development, is absent in a vegan diet without supplementation. The Belgian Royal Academy of Medicine states that a vegan diet in children can induce serious deficiencies in vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, iron, zinc, iodine, and DHA.

OUR SOLUTION

The Global Food Justice Alliance Meat to School Program aims to bring quality, nutrient-packed animal foods, including local, regeneratively produced red meat to school lunch programs. Our pilot project on May 10, 2024 was a huge success. Over 10,000 pounds of high quality beef from White Oak Pastures was distributed to the Jones County School System outside of Atlanta, Georgia. Alongside the beef, the kids were served local produce, like strawberries, blueberries, lettuce, and tomatoes.

There are amazing farms in Georgia producing high quality, nutritious animal-source foods. So, rather than telling kids to reduce their meat intake and giving them ultra-processed burritos, we can form connections between the farms and the schools to nourish the kids.

Not only are kids receiving nutritious meals of micronutrient-rich beef, they are also learning about nutrition and their local area, understanding where their food comes from. The kids can then take the experience from school of eating local meat and produce back to their families, expanding this knowledge and appreciation of local food systems.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Many kids, especially those in underserved communities, rely on school lunches to stay nourished throughout their day. Improving the nutritional quality of school meals is an effective way to support proper growth and development, ensure kids thrive academically and emotionally, and help kids and families learn about local food systems and nutrition.

We need to put nutrient-dense meat, dairy, and eggs back on the menu and focus on real solutions, like ensuring school meals offer nutrient-dense whole foods that support kids' healthy bodies, brains, and futures.

If you want to help us bring nutrient-rich food to children, consider becoming a GFJA member to support future Farm-to-School programs!

Become a Member

MYTH BUSTING MEATLESS MONDAYS: WHY MEAT IS A POWERFUL ALLY FOR SCHOOL NUTRITION ›